

Light

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Summary: Roy finds some meaning in life; both from a little boy, and from a key figure in his past. This is the third part of a three-part saga called Illumination about Roy coming clean.

Light

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"Help! Someone help me!!" Roy was walking home from the Titans party when he heard the cry. It was late, around two in the morning, and he was about three blocks away from Dinah's apartment. Grateful for the bow Ollie had retrieved and dropped off at the Lair, Roy ran to the sound of the cry.

When he found the source, he saw a woman struggling and pinned against the wall of an alley, with three men trying to rip off her clothes. As luck would have it, he happened to have a few arrows in a back quiver that he had retrieved from his arsenal at the Lair. He intended to practice tomorrow at his own range to make sure his skill was at the quality he expected, but now it looked like he was going to get an early test.

It was dark, but Roy could see well enough. He quickly found a stable stance, drew an arrow and nocked it in Brave Bow's longbow; luckily he had cared for it well so it was still useable; and with hardly a pause, let the arrow fly. The arrow found its target, the primary assailant's shoulder, and Roy was surprised to find himself relieved. The last time he shot a bow, he had missed three arrows in a row. He hadn't missed like that since he was seven, and even then he had gotten a punishment from Brave Bow for missing his target.

The other two men looked shocked in his direction, and he nocked a second arrow. He simply aimed, drew, and warned, "I think it's time you left the lady alone, don't you?"

One of the men grinned ferally and answered, "Yeah, sure. Now we have a hero here to play with."

"You can try," Roy felt an adrenaline rush and reveled in it. "Do you think I'm holding a toy? Look at your friend there." The man Roy had shot was on the ground glaring at the archer and holding his shoulder. The arrow had gone through so that the tip was showing out the front of the shoulder.

"Lucky shot. Let's see you fight this off, hero." The man produced a gun and pointed it directly at Roy. Roy shook his head sadly and grinned. He released the arrow, and it flew into the barrel of the gun. The intensity of the arrow forced the gun back into the man, grotesquely twisting his arm.

"Ow, man! You broke my arm!" The man protested.

"I warned you. How about you?" Roy looked at the third man while pulling a third arrow from the quiver. "You gonna make me use this arrow?"

"Naw, man, back off. It's cool." The third man stepped back holding his hands up palms out. Roy was actually having fun. It had been a long time since he felt a natural rush as he confronted adversaries, and he had forgotten how good it felt.

"It's not cool, 'man.' Next time you feel you need to attack a lady, you remember those arrows, ok?" Roy put the arrow back in the quiver, but stayed alert to retrieve it if necessary. Roy knew he had a reputation as a charmer and a ladies' man, but the truth was he simply felt more comfortable around women. It was probably because no woman had ever severely hurt him like the men in his life had, and consequently he felt a special hatred for anyone who would do harm to a woman.

"Yeah, sure," he said quickly, "Whatever you say. Let's get out of here, guys." Barely stopping to help his fallen friends, the uninjured man bolted from the alley, with his injured cronies following as best and quickly as they could. Roy watched the whole scene with mild amusement.

When the assailants were gone, Roy went to the woman and asked, "Are you ok, miss? Did they hurt you?"

Still shaking and tearful, she was trying to mend her torn clothing with her arms. Trying to sound composed, the woman responded, "Yes, thank you. I'll be ok."

Hindered by his quiver and the bow in his hand, Roy rather clumsily took off the jacket he was wearing, shouldered his bow, and wrapped the jacket around the woman. "Do you live around here? Can I walk you someplace?"

"Um, about a block from here. I was just going home from work. It's not that far, I thought I could get there without anything happening." She started to cry, and Roy thought he saw signs of shock. She still had her arms crossed in front of her, and Roy gently wrapped his unencumbered arm around her. He started to lead her out of the alley.

"My name's Roy. Will you tell me your name?" he said gently.

"Emily. My name's Emily." She allowed Roy to lead her, and offered when they got to the main street, "That way."

They got Emily safely to her front door, and Roy asked, "Is there anyone waiting for you? You probably shouldn't be alone."

"Yes, my husband's home." Emily seemed to be more coherent now, which Roy noted thankfully. "Thank you so much, Roy. I can never repay you."

"No repayment necessary, ma'am," Roy said with a TV-detective tone and a smile, "That's just what we heroes do."

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Roy made it home to Dinah's apartment and found Dinah sitting quietly alone in her living room clearly waiting up for him. "Wow you look like you've been in a fight. I hope that didn't happen at the party." Dinah greeted as Roy entered the living room.

"You knew too?" Roy shook his head and grinned. He was still on a high from the rescue. He explained his appearance, "I did a little rescue on the way home. A woman was being attacked a few blocks away."

"Oh! Is she ok?" Dinah asked, concerned.

"Yeah. Luckily I had the bow, and I took some arrows with me."

Dinah grinned. "Ok, should I ask if the attackers are ok?"

Roy returned Dinah's mischievous grin, "One has a hole in his shoulder, the other a broken arm. The third was too scared to do anything else but run. Emilyâ€"she told me her nameâ€"will be ok I think. I got there before they really got a chance to hurt her, and I walked her home."

"Well good, Roy! Looks like you're easing back into the hero role quite well!" Dinah beamed. Roy smiled. It did feel good to be a hero again. "Is that Brave Bow's bow?" She indicated the bow on Roy's shoulder.

He caressed the limb of the bow as he said, "Yeah. Ollie stopped by the Lair and dropped it off." Dinah heard the tone in Roy's voice and saw on his face that Roy considered it no small task what Oliver had done, but that he was still not willing to make amends with his guardian.

Dinah smiled warmly. "I'm glad he could do that for you, Roy. Speaking of Ollie, if I asked him over for dinner some night, would that be ok with you?"

Roy looked at Dinah for a moment and said, "No, I don't think so. I really appreciate what he did for me," Roy indicated the bow, "But right now I've got to straighten my own life out. If I let him talk to me, we're gonna end up right back where we started."

Dinah nodded thoughtfully. She wished Roy and Oliver could work out

their differences, but she knew that Roy was probably right. "What do you think you'll do? You're always welcome to stay here."

"Thanks, Dinah, but I think I need to get out on my own. Straighten things out for myself. I'll figure it out, don't worry."

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[Well, here I am] Roy thought, [Thanks to Bruce Wayne, I'm sitting here in a drug rehab office waiting to be paired with some kid.] It was a week later, and Roy was sitting slouched in the waiting room of the office with his arms crossed and a glowering, dark expression. He really didn't want to do this at all, but Bruce insisted. He said it was part of the deal he had made so that no charges would be brought against Roy for illegal drug use, and besides, Roy never could say no to Dick's guardian, even without that awful costume.

Bruce told Roy that the center had the perfect kid to set up with Roy. Roy thought he had enough to worry about. Why did he have to take on this kid's problems too? Bruce had given him some story about putting life in perspective, but Roy thought Bruce just wanted him to suffer.

He still had to find a permanent place to stay. For the past week he had been staying with one of the guys in the band he was in, and that seemed to be working out well enough. He appreciated Dinah's and Bruce's offers for a home, but Roy didn't want to stay with either. He needed to get out on his own and figure out his life. If he stayed with any of the adults he knew, he would feel suffocated and pushed into solutions that might not be what he needed. He could always make money with his archery somehow, and maybe with the band. He just had to make sure he didn't resort to his old methods that landed him in the drug crowd.

Roy was jarred out of his thoughts by an olive-toned woman with dark shoulder-length hair who was walking up to him. She reminded him of Mr. Skipitarus, his math teacher last year, so he guessed she was Greek. She looked familiar, but Roy couldn't quite place her. But she recognized him right away, "Well if it isn't my very own knight!"

Roy stood up when he realized who was before him, and smiled, "Emily! How are you doing?"

"It's rough, but it could have been a lot worse. Nickâ€"that's my husbandâ€"has been very supportive. So you're the new mentor for Ben?" Roy noticed that Emily didn't seem to even skip a beat when it was clear that her 'knight' was a recovering addict.

"Yeah, I guess. Bruce just told me to show up."

"Ahh, Bruce Wayne. I've heard of his support for our programs in Gotham. He seems like a nice, gentle person."

Roy almost didn't catch his laughter. "Hmm..nice, yeah, gentle..not the word I'd use for him." Roy smiled, indicating that, although he didn't consider Bruce gentle, he still liked the philanthropist. Most of the time.

Emily raised an eyebrow, but simply said, "I didn't put it together

last week, but considering you know someone as important as Bruce Wayne, and how well you handled those guys, and now that I see your name here on my sheet, you're one of the Teen Titans, aren't you?"

"Yeah, that's me. Speedy, archer extraordinaire." Roy commented sarcastically.

"You shouldn't underestimate what you do for the world, Roy. You and your friends are wonderful role models for today's youth."

"Role models? What, use drugs, and you'll get far?" Roy said cynically.

Emily shook her head. "No, obviously not that. But it shows that teens can make a difference. You and Robin are especially important because you have no special powers. And if your using ever does make the press, it should show that you're overcoming your addiction. Precisely the reason I want you to talk with Ben."

Roy shrugged and looked at the floor, "Yeah I guess."

Sensing that the conversation was over, Emily said, "Well, why don't we go to my office. Ben's waiting for us there."

When Emily and Roy reached her office, Roy saw a young black boy around 10 years old sitting in the same position Roy had been while waiting for Emily. "Hi, Ben," Emily started, "Sit up please." Ben grudgingly obliged, changing his position with quick scoot and a flop. Emily indicated the chair next to Ben which Roy took as Emily sat behind her desk. She explained to Roy while looking at the younger boy, "Ben obviously doesn't want to be here. Ben and his brother Bobby have been shuffled from foster home to foster home ever since Ben was four. His brother is 21 now; of age to take custody of Ben, so the brothers live together. Bobby is a cop and discovered Ben's drug use before it got too serious. He signed him up for this program. Ben doesn't think it's a problem."

"It isn't!" Ben interrupted, "I've got it under control."

Ben's words jolted Roy as he remembered saying them exactly a few weeks ago to Dick. Emily added patiently, "Ben, this is Roy. I want you to spend some time with him, ok? Since your brother has to work his beat on the weekends, he wanted you to spend time doing something constructive, and I think you could learn a lot from Roy."

Ben glared at Roy which Roy returned with a stoic countenance. "Why do I have to? He's just some kid. I can't learn anything from him."

Roy felt his anger that had been smoldering catch flame and his stoic expression turned to a glare. He started to get up as he said, "I don't need this. I don't care what Bruce says.."

"Roy, please. Sit." Emily said forcefully, and Roy obeyed with a glare and a huff.

Emily turned her attention back to the younger boy and said, "You might be surprised what Roy knows, Ben. He's only five years younger than Bobby, and you think Bobby knows a lot, don't you?" Ben

shrugged, but it was clear that Ben did think the world of his brother. "You should talk to him. We have some activities here you both might like to do. Basketball court in the back, ping pong tables downstairs, and a pool table was just donated to us."

Ben shrugged, and Roy stayed quiet, fuming. Emily sighed, and she suggested, "Why not some pool? The cues and balls are down there too." Roy noticed a twinkle in her eye, and she smiled and winked at the teen. Roy grinned back.

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"So, what do you do for fun?" Roy asked as he racked the balls. He figured he might as well make the best of the situation, and the conversation he and Emily had had in the waiting room about being a role model had started to sink in.

Ben shrugged as he retrieved his cue, and said, "I dunno. Hang out, I guess."

[Great,] Roy thought, [Just like pulling teeth.] He tried again, "Do you play any sports?"

"I like archery, but my brother can't afford a bow for me." Roy knew the shock registered on his face, but he couldn't stop it. No wonder Bruce and Emily wanted him paired with Ben!

After a moment, Roy was able to control his expression, and he didn't think Ben caught his surprise since the boy hadn't been looking at him. He decided to play it cool. He picked up his own cue as he said, "Archery, huh? You mean like the Indians? What got you interested in that?"

"It's not just like Indians," Ben said defensively, looking definantly at Roy. "It can be used to help people. Like Speedy does." Now Roy really had to sit before he fell down. He walked over to the chair in the corner and sat. His identity was public, but he wasn't always recognized, and obviously Ben didn't identify him. Ben continued, "That's why I don't think drugs is a problem. I mean, my friends say Speedy takes them, so it must be ok."

Roy felt like he had just been hit by a train, and his cue slipped from his grasp. He started to fall forward and caught his head in his hands before he fell out of the chair. He simply sat rocking back and forth for a moment before Ben asked, "What's wrong?"

After he was sure he wasn't going to black out, Roy lifted his head and looked at the boy, "You don't recognize me, do you?"

Ben looked puzzled and, with a furrowed brow, shook his head. "Why should I? You know Speedy or something?"

"Kid, I *am* Speedy!"

Ben laughed, but it was an uncertain laugh, "Yeah right. Speedy wouldn't be hanging out around here."

"Well I didn't want to, did I? Your friends are right, I was using, but it's not ok. Heroes make mistakes too, Ben." Roy could see that his young companion wasn't convinced. "Ok, you know where that old

range is in Ramsey Park?" Ben nodded. "Meet me there tomorrow. I'll bring two bows, and I'll give you a lesson. Ok?"

Ben still looked suspicious, but agreed, "Ok."

Roy continued, "Look, I know you don't believe me, but when I convince you maybe you'll remember this. Do you love your brother?"

Ben shrugged, "Yeah, sure. He's all I have."

"Good. You know, I didn't even have that when I was your age. I grew up on a Navajo reservation where most people didn't want me there because I wasn't Navajo. My real dad died in a fire when I was two, and my guardian now leaves me alone for weeks at a time. I felt lonely and that's why I got into drugs. You know Robin?"

Ben nodded solemnly. Roy could see that the boy was listening. "It took Robin to make me realize that I wasn't only hurting myself, but all the people who care for me, including all the Titans. If you continue to use drugs, you'll be hurting your brother too. Do you want to do that?"

Looking at the floor, Ben shook his head. Roy sighed and patted the boy's shoulder. "Come on. Let's get this game underway."

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Roy showed up at Ramsey Park with his own practice bow and the bow he had had as a boy along with 2 quivers full of field-tip arrows; no trick arrows this time. He brought his old bow because he knew any bow he used now would be much too heavy for Ben. He had been thinking about the boy all last night, and he had decided that if Ben showed a genuine interest in archery, that Roy would give him his old bow.

The range's backstop was a wall made from hay bales tied together and was about shoulder-high on Roy. He put up a practice target, and was waiting for only a few minutes before Ben showed up. "Hey, Ben," Roy greeted, "Glad to see you made it. Ever shoot one of these before?" Roy held up the weaker bow.

Ben shrugged, and said, "A little bit when my brother took me to a demo the archery club did."

"Good! Why don't you show me." Roy handed Ben the weaker bow and the second quiver which Ben slung over his shoulder. Ben took an arrow and, while his motions weren't as smooth as Roy's, he did manage to nock an arrow. Ben put the odd-colored fletching out, which Roy noted with pleased interest. He turned sideways from the target, making sure of his stance, and brought the bow up. He closed his back eye, and drew the bow.

"Wait, wait." Roy interrupted. Ben released the tension and looked rather annoyed at the archer. "Close your front eye. You want to line up the string and the arrow with the target. Your back eye is closer to the string. Get it?"

"Yeah," Ben was starting to think that maybe there was something to this guy. He tried again, this time closing his front eye, and

released. The arrow flew well, but went too high to stick into a tree a few feet behind the backstop.

"Good! Now try again, but lower your aim. Targetting is just a matter of adjusting your aim each time."

"Wait. How do I know you're who you said you were yesterday? I mean, you say you have Speedy's history, but you could just know that like I do." Ben looked suspicious.

"What would you consider proof?" Roy asked.

"Hmm." Ben thought a moment. It couldn't be too easy, for he knew Speedy could hit anything. "How about this?" Ben produced a bright red jellybean from the bag his brother had given him that morning. He handed his bow to Roy, and walked to the target. He skewered the candy on the target with an extra pin, and returned. Roy grinned, "Want to time me?"

Ben nodded agreement, and Roy handed him his watch. Roy held his bow at rest position waiting for Ben's mark. "Ready, go."

In one fluid, quick motion, Roy retrieved an arrow, nocked it as he raised his bow, drew, and released. The arrow flew true, driving the jelly bean into the backstop. Roy grinned at Ben, and as Ben was about call the time, Roy stopped him, "Not done yet." He repeated his motions, and the second arrow flew to the first, splitting the first arrow right down the middle. Then he took a third arrow, and split the second arrow.

"Wow! 10 seconds!" Ben exclaimed. "Cool! You really are Speedy! What's it like being a superhero? Do you save people very often? What's Wonder Girl like? Can you teach me to shoot like that?"

"Whoa! Slow down!" Roy laughed. "Saving people is what makes it all worth it. And Wonder Girl is even more beautiful than she is in the newspapers. But hands off," Roy grinned. "She's taken." He continued, "I don't know if I can teach you to shoot as well as I can; I've been at this for a long time, but I'll teach you to shoot if you want."

"Cool! The guys at school are never gonna believe this!"

Roy laughed. He had no idea he had such a following. "Come on," He put his bow down, and with a wave of his hand indicated for Ben to follow him to the target to retrieve the arrows. Ben got there first, running ahead to inspect the crushed jellybean. He pulled out the last arrow, and the second arrow shot fell to the ground. He pulled the first arrow just as Roy caught up to him and peered into the hole for the jellybean. He stuck a finger in and extracted the candy. The arrow had punctured exactly in the center of the target.

"That's so cool!" Ben exclaimed.

Roy laughed, enjoying the bit of hero worship, and suggested, "I'll go get that arrow from the tree. Wait here." Roy explained, "Someone should always wait in front of the target if someone else goes behind it. That way if someone else comes, they won't start shooting at the target and maybe hitting the person behind the target." Ben nodded

and Roy walked around to retrieve the arrow.

Roy had just reached the arrow and was starting to pry it from the tree, when he heard Ben's cry, "Roy! Help!"

Roy spun around and saw an Hispanic kid about Roy's age lifting and holding Ben in a one-armed bearhug. The pair was halfway between the target and the shooting line, and the kid was waving a gun and yelling, "Shut up, kid, or I'll give your brother his lesson early!" Roy cursed himself as he realized that he left his bow on the shooting line, and without thinking ran toward the pair. He had reached the backstop when the Hispanic boy pointed his gun at Roy and fired. Caught unprepared, Roy took the bullet in the chest and fell.

"Roy!!" Ben screamed as he felt the assailant's grip on him release. Ben dropped to the ground to see his brother in uniform punch out the kid. "Bobby?! What?!" Ben was confused by his brother's arrival. After verifying the assailant's unconsciousness, Bobby quickly crouched in front of his brother and put his hands on Ben's shoulders. He ran his hands down Ben's arms and asked urgently, "Are you ok? Did he hurt you?" He ran his eyes over his brother as if to examine him. Once Bobby confirmed his brother's well-being, he stood and ran to the fallen archer. Ben followed.

Bobby reached Roy, turned him onto his back and inspected the wound. It was bad. Ben started to babble, "He wanted to help, but he didn't have his bow! He's Speedy, Bobby! Don't let him die!"

Bobby reached up to take his brother's arm and pulled him to a kneeling position. "Ben, put your hand here," he commanded urgently, placing Ben's hand over the wound. "Press hard or he's gonna die!" Tearful and scared, Ben nodded. Bobby quickly checked Roy's vitals. He found a weak pulse, and the teen was breathing. "Backup should be here soon. I hope to God they hurry."

Ben looked up at his brother and tearfully asked, "Is he going to die? I don't want him to die, Bobby!"

"Not if we can get him to the hospital soon." Bobby wasn't as confident as he let his little brother believe, but his brother was scared enough. "I'll do that now," Bobby placed his hands over his brother's and Ben withdrew.

Suddenly Bobby remembered something his brother had said a moment ago. "Did you say he's Speedy? The hero you like? Why didn't he..?" Bobby looked around and saw the abandoned bow. "Oh, God." He looked back at Roy. His face was pale and he had lost a lot of blood already. Bobby couldn't let his little brother's hero die.

Ben remembered his earlier confusion. "Bobby, how did you know?"

Bobby explained, "We caught his buddy who told us he was out for revenge. I put his older brother away last week. His buddy knew you were here and said that Juan was gonna come after you, so I booked over here."

Ben nodded as the sound of sirens came into hearing range. A moment later the paramedics took over, and Bobby stood up and pulled his

brother out of the professionals' way. He took Ben aside and held him as the brothers silently watched the medics fight for Roy's life.

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It was dark, and Roy felt detached, as if he were floating. The arrow. Oh, God, the gun. I must be dead. Is this dead? Somehow he always thought there would be more. He realized that he could see a figure. The Great Spirit? No. No hunting spear. Then who? The figure became clearer. Roy realized the figure looked like him. But older. Maybe how he would have looked. If he wasn't dead. The figure was wearing..it looked like a uniform. Roy couldn't tell what kind.

The figure spoke. Roy would have jumped if he had something to jump with. "Do you know who I am, Roy?"

Roy tried to speak. He heard his voice, but it was odd. Like it came from somewhere else. "No, I don't think so. Am I dead?"

"You are close to death, Roy. But you're not dead." The figure became more clear, and Roy could see its red hair. So red that it almost seemed to be on fire. "I'm your father, Roy. Your real father. Do you remember me?"

Roy felt ashamed. He didn't know why. His father died in a fire when he was two, so there would be no way he would remember him. "No, I'm sorry. Why are you here?" Roy felt the sensation of tears coming, and he asked the question that had always been on his mind, "Why did you leave me?"

"I'm so sorry, Roy. The last thing I wanted was to leave my little boy alone in the world. But I've always been with you. I know how hard your life has been Roy. I wish I could have been with you in your world. To raise you so you would always know my love. But now, fate has made it possible for me to tell you. I love you, Roy. I've always loved you. You're going to survive this trauma. When you return, remember me. Know that I walk with you wherever you go."

Roy's illusory tears were flowing now. He always wondered what it would be like to be told by a parent that he was loved. He never thought he would experience it. "You'll always be with me? Forever?"

"I'll never leave your side. You're going to have good times, and bad times, and I'll be with you through it all. And when you're ready to join the Great Spirit, I'll be here to show you your way."

Roy nodded. He thought aloud, "You've always been with me? You know..what I've done?"

"Yes, I know. It pained me to see you hurt yourself. I'm glad you were able to turn your life around. I'm proud of you for being able to do that in the face of all your difficulties. Stay clean, Roy. It's the best gift you can give yourself and the daughter you're going to have one day. When your daughter arrives, raise her like I would have raised you. Let her always know your love."

A daughter? Him? He never thought he'd ever be a father. His own

father spoke, "It's time for you to rejoin the waking world, Roy. Take this as a token of my love." His father held a piece of petrified wood in his hand, which, somehow, Roy took. "This wood symbolizes my eternal love for you."

The image of his father started to fade. Just as it disappeared, Roy called tearfully, "Dad? I love you."

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"One, two, three...clear!" Roy felt a jolt, and the detached feeling was replaced by searing pain and a bright light. He wished he could close his eyes against the light, but he was pretty sure his eyes were already closed. "We've got him! He's back!"

Roy was aware of voices. They sounded frantic. He couldn't make out all of the words. He was aware of beeping. He didn't know what that was. He heard his name. "Roy? Roy, can you hear me?"

Roy didn't want to open his eyes. The light was too bright already. But the voice wasn't going to go away, so he did. The light wasn't as bad as he expected, and he puzzled out a figure hovering over him. "Hey, there we go," the voice said. "I'm Dr. Anderson, Roy. I'm glad you could join us." Roy tried to move his right arm to his chest, but there was something tangled around his arm. He felt a hand on his arm. "Don't move, Roy. Your chest wound is serious, but now that you're awake, you're going to be ok. There's a little boy who's going to be very glad to hear that. You've been with us for a few days, and you're in intensive care."

Roy nodded weakly and closed his eyes. It took too much effort to keep them open, and thankfully, Dr. Anderson seemed to accept that. He felt the hand go away, and a moment later he felt a hand take his own. The hand felt familiar, and he heard a voice. "Roy? I know it hurts to keep your eyes open. Can you squeeze my hand?" Donna. Donna was here. Roy tried to do as she asked. He guessed he succeeded because she continued softly, "You gave us quite a scare, Roy. We're on a shift schedule for you, but I'll call everyone now. The boy you befriended--Ben? He's waiting too. His brother made him go to school." Roy gave a weak smile. He was glad to hear that Ben was ok. He'd have to find out what happened.

Fuzzily, Roy did a mental scan of his body and realized that besides the horrible pain in his chest, that he could also feel something smooth in his left hand. Without moving otherwise, Roy felt the object in his hand and recognized the wood his father had given him.

Tears started to leak from his closed eyes, and Donna's voice became frightened, "Roy, are you ok?"

"Yeah," Roy whispered weakly, "My father has shown me light."

End
file.